

Amy Hill  
401 Bentley Park Loop  
Missoula, MT 59801

February 1, 2013

The Honorable Representative Ron Ehli  
Montana House of Representatives  
PO Box 200400  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Health & Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee,

I am a social worker and have been a mental health case manager for the past two years, most recently with the SDMI waiver serving Missoula County. For people who have higher needs than local mental health centers can address, who might otherwise end up in a nursing home or the state hospital long-term, the Medicaid SDMI waiver has been an effective way to provide treatment in the community.

Case managers with the Medicaid waiver work with consumers to coordinate supports to keep them living in the community. We work on the process of recovery, helping clients to define their own goals and set about trying to achieve them, knowing the symptoms of mental illness may never disappear and will most likely need to be faced on a daily basis.

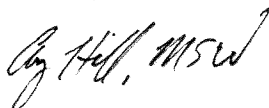
One of the main benefits of the SDMI waiver program is the prevention of hospitalizations, nursing home commitments, and state hospital stays. This benefit can be seen both economically and socially. In terms of tax payer dollars, it is much cheaper to have consumers receiving services in the community than in the hospital or nursing home. The average yearly cost for a nursing home stay in Montana is approximately \$70,000. In contrast, the average annual budget for an SDMI waiver client receiving services in Missoula is \$20,000.

Socially, consumers have chosen Medicaid waiver services because they want to be a part of their community. Many of the consumers I work with have friends, family, churches, agencies, and advocacy projects they are connected with. Hospitalizations disrupt these relationships and consumers have a difficult time sorting out housing, income, and other services once they are released.

I am not arguing against all hospitalizations or stays in other institutions. There are times when these measures are necessary for the safety and well-being of individuals. However, in instances when they can be prevented, the Medicaid waiver program helps this to happen. When a consumer is experiencing a mental health crisis, waiver teams help them to receive treatment in the least restrictive setting.

All 40 Missoula waiver slots are currently full and there is a waitlist of 17 individuals. When considering budget cuts, I would ask that you take the benefits of home and community based services to consumers, tax payers, and the greater public into consideration. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Amy Hill, MSW

